

Message Text

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ACTION EA-14

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 CIEP-02 ACDA-19 NIC-01 A-01 M-02 OPR-02

SY-04 INRE-00 OC-06 CCO-00 CU-05 AID-20 PC-10 OMB-01

EB-11 COME-00 DRC-01 CIAE-00 PM-07 H-03 INR-10 L-03

NSAE-00 NSC-07 PA-04 RSC-01 PRS-01 SP-03 SS-20 SSO-00

NSCE-00 /159 W

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FM AMEMBASSY BANGKOK

TO SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 4853

INFO AMEMBASSY KUALA LUMPUR

AMEMBASSY PHNOM PENH

AMEMBASSY RANGOON

AMEMBASSY VIENTIANE

AMEMBASSY SAIGON

AMCONSUL CHIANG MAI

AMCONSUL UDORN

13TH ADVON UDORN

USSAG NAKHON PHANOM

CINCPAC

SECDEF WASHDC

DIA

USIA WASHDC

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 1 OF 2 BANGKOK 11038

CINCPAC FOR POLAD

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PGOV, PINS, ASEC, TH

SUBJ: COMMENTS ON BANGKOK CHINATOWN RIOTS

REF: A. BANGKOK 10933

B. BANGKOK 10935

C. BANGKOK 10947

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D. FBIS D070818 JUL 74

E. FBIS D051650 JUL 74

SUMMARY: YOUTHS AND HOODLUMS ACTED OUT THE CHINESE COMMUNITY'S CONTEMPT FOR THE POLICE IN PHLAPHLACHAI PRECINCT OF BANGKOK FROM JULY 3 TO 7. THE CIVILIAN GOVERNMENT'S SUPPRESSION OF THE URBAN RIOT HAS STRENGTHENED ITS IMAGE AND ACCEPTABILITY. THE RIOTS WERE NOT RELATED TO THE UNITED STATES' PRESENCE AND WERE NOT DIRECTED TOWARD US. END SUMMARY

DOMESTIC IMPLICATIONS

1. MORALE OF THE SECURITY SERVICES. SINCE OCTOBER 1973 THE PUBLIC STANDING OF THE SECURITY SERVICES, AND ESPECIALLY THE POLICE, HAS BEEN PARTICULARLY LOW. THE POLICE MORALE HAS RISEN CONSIDERABLY, HOWEVER, SINCE THEY RECEIVED THE GOVERNMENT'S BACKING AND AUTHORITY TO PUT DOWN THE PHLAPHLACHAI PRECINCT RIOTING. THE MILITARY SERVICES ARE PLEASED WITH THE GOVERNMENT'S FIRMNESS, AND RELIEVED AT NOT HAVING TO SHOOT RIOTERS THEMSELVES. THEY PROBABLY ALSO SEE THE INCIDENT AS ONE WHICH CONFIRMS THE IMPORTANCE OF MILITARY SUPPORT FOR THE GOVERNMENT AND THEIR ATTITUDE THAT A STRONGER HAND WAS NEEDED.

2. THAI SOCIETY IS CONSERVATIVE AND HAS BEEN STRAINED BY THE CHANGES IN PROCESS AND TENSIONS THAT HAVE BEEN EXPOSED SINCE OCTOBER 1973. THE MILITARY LEADERSHIP IS NOT ALONE IN ITS RESTLESSNESS OVER THE APPARENT UNWILLINGNESS OF THE SANYA GOVERNMENT TO STAND UP TO DEMANDS OF STUDENTS, WORKERS, FARMERS AND POLITICAL SNIPERS. WHILE REGRETTING THE VIOLENCE, THE ESTABLISHMENT WILL FEEL MORE CONFIDENCE IN ITSELF AND THE GOVERNMENT'S ABILITIES. IMPORTANT SEGMENTS OF THE SOCIETY WILL BE REASSURED THAT THE GOVERNMENT WILL NOT PERMIT SOCIETY TO BE RULED BY MOB VIOLENCE.

3. SINCE THE GENERAL PUBLIC SUPPORTED THE ARMED SUPPRESSION OF THE RIOTING, THE SANYA GOVERNMENT HAS EMERGED WITH A MORE FORCEFUL IMAGE. HAVING WEATHERED THE STORM AND DEMONSTRATED ITS ABILITY TO MAINTAIN LAW AND ORDER, THE GOVERNMENT MAY ACT WITH GREATER CONFIDENCE VIS-A-VIS ITS
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CRITICS.

4. DURING PREVIOUSLY SMALLER CIVIL DISTURBANCES, STUDENT LEADERS FROM VARIOUS ORGANIZATIONS TRIED TO MODERATE THE SITUATION. THE CHINATOWN RIOTING, HOWEVER, DID NOT INVOLVE ANY STUDENT GROUPS OR POPULAR ISSUES; STUDENT LEADERS FOUND THERE WAS NO LAW AND ORDER ROLE FOR THE STUDENTS TO PLAY. KRIANGSAK KHRODI, LEADER OF THE UNITED FRONT OF PEOPLE AND

STUDENTS (UFPS), A SMALL ULTRANATIONALIST STUDENT GROUP, RUSHED TO THE SCENE AND WAS SHOT IN THE LEG THE FIRST NIGHT OF THE RIOTING. OTHER STUDENT LEADERS WHO APPEARED ON THE SCENE RECOGNIZED THEIR IRRELEVANCE AND WITHDREW. THE GOVERNMENT MADE ANUMBER OF PUBLIC ANNOUNCEMENTS DURING THE RIOTING WHICH IT INTENDED WOULD DEFLECT STUDENT INVOLVEMENT. IT ALSO CONSULTED WITH CERTAIN STUDENT LEADERS.

IMPLICATIONS FOR THE UNITED STATES

5. THE RIOTS THEMSELVES WERE BORN OF CAUSES NOT RELATED TO US AND THEY WERE NOT DIRECTED AT THE AMERICAN MILITARY PRESENCE IN THAILAND. BECAUSE THAI POLITICAL SOPHISTICATION AND THAI CAPACITY FOR SELF-CRITICISM ARE NOT WELL DEVELOPED, THE THAI CAN EASILY FALL INTO BELIEVING "CONSPIRACY" THEORIES. STUDENT ACTIVISTS APPEAR FRUSTRATED IN THEIR SPUR OF THE MOMENT UNSUCCESSFUL ATTEMPT TO GIN UP A DEMONSTRATION AT THE EMBASSY JULY 4 AGAINST THE AMERICAN MILITARY PRESENCE. THEREFORE, THEY ARE TRYING TO DRUM UP SUPPORT FOR THE LINE THAT THE AMERICANS, OR AT LEAST THE CIA, WERE RESPONSIBLE FOR THE RIOTING WHICH SAPPED THEIR PROPOSED DEMONSTRATIONS (REF D). WE CAN EXPECT SOME OF OUR CRITICS TO CONTINUE TO ATTEMPT TO ESTABLISH A LINGKAGE TETWEEN THIS OUTBREAK OF VIOLENCE AND SUPPRESSION AND THE AMERICAN PRESENCE.

6. STUDENT ACTIVISTS HAVE ALREADY TRIED TO DEVELOP AN EX POST FACTO ROLE FOR THEMSELVES BY GIVING PUBLICITY TO INCIDENTS OF POLICE BRUTALITY. THEY WILL ALSO CRITICIZE POLICE PRACTICES AND INEFFICIENCIES, AND GENERALLY MAKE DEROGATORY COMMENTS ON THE ROLE OF THE POLICE IN THE CHINATOWN RIOTS. THE PUBLIC, HOWEVER, SUPPORTS THE GOVERNMENT'S SUPPRESSION OF THE RIOTERS. THE STUDENT ACTIVISTS, THUS, MAY BE UNDERMINING THEIR INFLUENCE WITHIN THE SOCIETY BY THIS TACTIC.

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THE ACTORS AND THE CAUSES

7. THE CHINESE COMMUNITY. THE THAI HAVE A LONG HISTORY OF ASSIMILATING THE CHINESE MINORITY, YET THIS HAS LEFT A DISTINCT PATTERN WHERE THE CHINESE RUN THE ECONOMY AND THE THAI RUN THE GOVERNMENT. A MUCH DESCRIBED SYMBIOTIC REALTIONSHIP HAS DEVELOPED WHERE THE CHINESE MERCHANT CLASS PAYS OFF THE THAI BUREAUCRACY TO SECURE ITS ECONOMIC WELL BEING AND INFLUENCE GOVERNMENT POLICIES. THE RECENT INFLATION IN THAILAND HAS PLACED SPECIAL STRAINS ON THIS SYMBIOTIC RELATIONSHIP, ESPECIALLY ON THE MIDDLE CLASS SHOP-KEEPER. THE INFLATION IS PROBABLY HARDEST ON YOUNG EDUCATED TYPES, MANY OF WHOM IN CERTAIN AREAS ARE CHINESE.

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CINCPAC FOR POLAD

8. THE CHINESE, LIKE OTHER SEGMENTS OF THE SOCIETY, HAVE FEW, IF ANY OPEN POLITICAL CHANNELS TO DEVELOP AND PROTECT THEIR INTERESTS. THUS ECONOMIC AND POLITICAL FRUSTRATIONS HAVE SUBTLY DEVELOPED WITHIN THE CHINESE COMMUNITY. THAI SUSPICIONS ABOUT THE LOYALTY OF THOSE MEMBERS OF THE CHINESE COMMUNITY NOT YET ASSIMILATED HAVE BEEN HEIGHTENED AS THAILAND CAUTIOUSLY EXPERIMENTS WITH ADJUSTING ITS RELATIONS WITH MAINLAND
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CHINA.

9. THE POLICE. THE THAI POLICE HAS A DESERVED REPUTATION FOR CORRUPTION, PETTY HARASSMENT, AND INEFFECTIVENESS. POLICE HARASSMENT OF RURAL VILLAGERS IS A RECOGNIZED FACTOR CONTRIBUTING TO THE GROWTH AND DEVELOPMENT OF THE RUQFP COMMUNIST INSURGENCY. IT IS THUS NOT SURPRISING THAT POLICE INCOMPETENCE CONTRIBUTED TO THE LOCALIZED URBAN FRUSTRATIONS WHICH MANIFESTED THEMSELVES IN THE THREE NIGHTS OF RIOTING BETWEEN JULY 3 AND 6. PRIME MINISTER SANYA THAMMASAK ADMITTED IN A PRESS INTERVIEW AFTER A CABINET MEETING JULY 5 THAT "HATRED AGAINST POLICEMEN PARTIALLY CONTRIBUTED TO THE RIOTING (REF E).

10. FRUSTRATIONS WHICH THE POLICE FELT PRIMED THEM FOR A SHOOT OUT ONCE THE RIOTS ERUPTED. THE POLICE HAD EXPERIENCED A SERIOUS FALL IN PRESIGE AS A RESULT OF THE OCTOBER VIOLENCE WHICH HAD LED TO A GROWING IMPOTENCE IN CONTROLLING CRIME AND VIOLENCE. THE POLICE NEEDED A SITUATION WHERE THEY AGAIN WERE THE PROTECTORS OF LAW AND ORDER AND GAINED SUPPORT FROM THE SOCIETY FOR THEIR ACTIONS. THE CHINATOWN RIOTS AT LEAST WON THEM A MEASURE OF GENERAL COMMUNITY SUPPORT.

11. RANKING POLICE OFFICIALS HAVE PUBLICLY ADMITTED THAT POLICE HANDLING OF THE EMERGING RIOT CONTRIBUTED TO THE VIOLENCE. ASSISTANT POLICE DIRECTOR WITHUN YASAWAT IS QUOTED IN "THE NATION" JULY 8 AS SAYING THAT YOUNG, INEXPERIENCED POLICE OVERREACTED TO THE DEVELOPING SITUATION. THE FACT THAT THE PHLAPPLACHAI POLICE STATION WAS UNDER-STAFFED AND THAT THE POLICE FAMILIES LIVED IN THE SAME COMPOUND WITH THE STATION ALSO CONTRIBUTED TO THIS OVER-REACTION AND FIRING INTO THE CROWD.

12. THE RIOTERS. THE GOVERNMENT LABELED THE RIOTERS AS YOUNG HOODLUMS AND IDENTIFIED TWO CRIMINAL GANGS BY NAME. OTHER YOUTH AND HOODLUM ELEMENTS IN THE AREA WERE, HOWEVER, ACTING OUT THE CONTEMPT THE CHINESE COMMUNITY HELD FOR THE POLICE. THE GOVERNMENT'S IMAGE SINCE OCTOBER OF LAXITY IN THE FACT OF CHALLENGE ALSO EMBOLDENED THE RIOTERS.

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13. THE MILITARY. THE ARMY COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF KEPT A LOW PROFILE IN HIS PEACEKEEPING ROLE AND APPARENTLY GAVE FULL SUPPORT TO THE

CIVILIAN AUTHORITY OF THE RTG. THE ARMY HAS PROBABLY OVERCOME SOME LURKING SUSPICIONS OF THE LIKELIHOOD OF A MILITARY COUP. AT THE SAME TIME THEY ARE KEEPING THEIR DISTANCE FROM AMERICANS, REMAINING ON ALERT AND KEEPING THEIR GUARD UP, PROBABLY UNTIL THE DECLARED STATE OF EMERGENCY IS ENDED. INDICATIONS OF THIS RESERVE WERE MONDAY DECISIONS CANCELLING REPRESENTATIONAL ACTIVITIES WITH MEMBERS OF THE US MISSION: A WHITE ELEPHANT AWARD CEREMONY WAS POSTPONED ON SHORT NOTICE, AND A DINNER BY THE ACTING SUPREME COMMANDER HONORING COMUSMACHTAI WAS CANCELLED EARLIER TODAY.

14. DIFFERENCES FROM OCTOBER 1973. THE PHLAPPLACHAI RIOTERS DID NOT GAIN GENERAL COMMUNITY AND PUBLIC SUPPORT BECAUSE THEY WERE NOT IN ADVOCACY OF A PREVIOUSLY WELL-DEFINED ISSUE. THE RIOT WAS WITHOUT WARNING, WHEREAS THE VIOLENCE IN OCTOBER WAS PRECEDED BY A WEEK OF DEMONSTRATIONS AND FAVORABLE PUBLICITY. WHATEVER THE FRUSTRATIONS, THE RIOT WAS A SPONTANEOUS OUTBURST OF VIOLENCE. THE CHINATOWN RIOTERS APPEARED FROM THE FIRST TO BE THE AGGRESSORS, WHEREAS IN OCTOBER THE STUDENTS WERE UNARMED AND PASSIVELY DEMONSTRATING. THE GOVERNMENT WAS ABLE TO CONTAIN THE SITUATION WITHOUT THE ALARMING ACTION OF COMMITTING REGULAR ARMY TROOPS TO THE FRAY.
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